THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) Authentic information on child labour in the country is generated by the decennial census. According to the 1991 census, the number of working children in India was 11.28 million. The figures of the 2001 census have not yet been published.

(b) Government of India has taken steps for withdrawal and rehabilitation of child labour working in hazardous occupations to reduce the incidence of child labour in a particular district through the Scheme of National Child Labour Projects (NCLPs). Under the Scheme of NCLP, special schools have been set up in the child labour endemic districts with the provision for non-formal/formal education, vocational training, stipend, nutrition, health-care etc. So far, 100 NCLPs have been sanctioned in 13 child labour endemic districts for coverage of 2.11 lakh children. As per the information available, 1.45 lakh children (approx.) have already been mainstreamed into the formal school system.

(c) and (d) The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 prohibits employment of children in occupations and processes listed in the schedule to the Act and regulates it in all other employments.

The issue regarding amendment of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 has been discussed in several fora including the Conference of the State Labour Ministers. Important suggestions made in the conference to make the Act more stringent include (a) making the offence a cognizable one; (b) making the penalties more stringent and deterrent; and (c) the responsibility as to the proof of age of a child being 'made that of the employer. Amendment of the Act is an ongoing process. As of now, no definite time frame can be indicated for amendment of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986.

Agricultural labourers

1737. SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA:
DR.ABRAR AHMED:

Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) the number of agricultural labourers in the country as per the latest census;

(b) what benefits have been provided to the agricultural labourers under the Social Security Scheme "Krishi Shramik Samajik Suraksha Yojana-2001'; and

(c) how many labourers have been covered under the scheme so far?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) According to the provisional estimates of 2001 Census, there are about 10.7 crore agricultural labourers in the country.

(b) The 'Krishi Shramik Samajik Suraksha Yojana-2001' envisages to provide life-cum-accident insurance, money back, pension and superannuation benefits.

(c) According to reports received from the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIG), 1,73,915 (Provisional) agricultural labourers have been covered under the scheme upto 31.10.2002.

Investment of EPF

1738. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering to restructure investment of Employees Provident Fund (EPF) to optimise its earnings;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken by Government to ensure the subscribers to continue to get higher return on their money?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINMSTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) to (c) Modification of investment pattern/ guidelines is a continuous process. Central Board of Trustees, Employees Provident Fund as a custodian to the funds belonging to workers constantly strives to achieve best possible returns while assuring maximum safety.

Increasing unemployment

1739. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the cases of unemployment in the country has increased in the nineties *vis-a-vis* eighties;